



Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Division

2008 RUFFED GROUSE AND AMERICAN WOODCOCK COOPERATORS EARLY SEASON REPORT

Early season reports from ruffed grouse and American woodcock cooperators allow biologists to quickly assess hunter success and local field conditions across the state of Michigan at the beginning of the grouse season. This report is a summary of their responses for September 15-18, 2008.

Cooperators returned 95 useable surveys. They hunted 493 hours in 43 counties during the survey period. Respondents hunted most in Zone 2, followed by Zone 1, and Zone 3. Hunters reported the highest average flush rates for grouse and woodcock in Zones 2 and 3, respectively (Table 1). Individual counties having at least 10 hours of hunting with the highest flush rates for grouse were Marquette, Gladwin, Ontonagon, Grand Traverse, and Crawford. Although the woodcock season was not open during the survey period, cooperators were asked to also count woodcock flushes. Individual counties having at least 10 hours of hunting with the highest flush rates for woodcock were Wexford, Allegan, Gladwin, Kalkaska, and Mackinac.

About 44% of the respondents thought grouse populations were up or slightly up from last year in the areas they hunted, with 32% reporting populations about the same as the previous year (Table 2). About 29% of the respondents thought woodcock populations were up or slightly up from last year. However, 32% thought woodcock numbers were the same and 38% thought that the numbers were down (Table 2).

Ruffed grouse have approximately ten-year cycles in abundance over much of Canada, Alaska, and the Great Lakes states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan (Rusch et al. 1999). Many theories have been proposed to explain these cycles including diseases, weather, forest fires, sunspots, starvation, crowding, predators, genetic changes, and chance (Rusch 1989). It appears that we may be at the midway point of the ten-year cycle (Figure 1). However, hunters should note that increased or decreased abundance of animals at a regional scale does not ensure the same trend locally. The best grouse and woodcock hunting opportunities will continue to be in areas of young early forest successional habitat.

Several hunters commented on the 2-3 days of very wet conditions in many areas of Michigan prior to the opener of the grouse season. Hunters also commented on good food availability for grouse. Some hunters said that they would prefer that grouse season open later in the season when there is less foliage. Some hunters suggested that grouse and woodcock season open on the same day.

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Literature Cited

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Table 1. Ruffed grouse and American woodcock flush rates by zone and year for September 15-18.

Zone	2007			2008		
	Hours	Grouse / hour	Woodcock / hour	Hours	Grouse / hour	Woodcock / hour
1	193.9	2.7	0.6	139.3	2.3	0.5
2	496.0	2.5	1.6	315.9	2.4	1.0
3	50.7	0.9	0.9	37.5	0.9	1.3
State	740.6	2.4	2.4	492.6	2.3	0.9

Table 2. Hunter opinions about ruffed grouse and American woodcock populations.

Trend	Ruffed grouse		Woodcock	
	2007	2008	2007	2008
Up	21%	14%	9%	4%
Slightly Up	30%	29%	14%	25%
Same	33%	32%	50%	32%
Slightly Down	12%	10%	14%	22%
Down	4%	13%	14%	16%

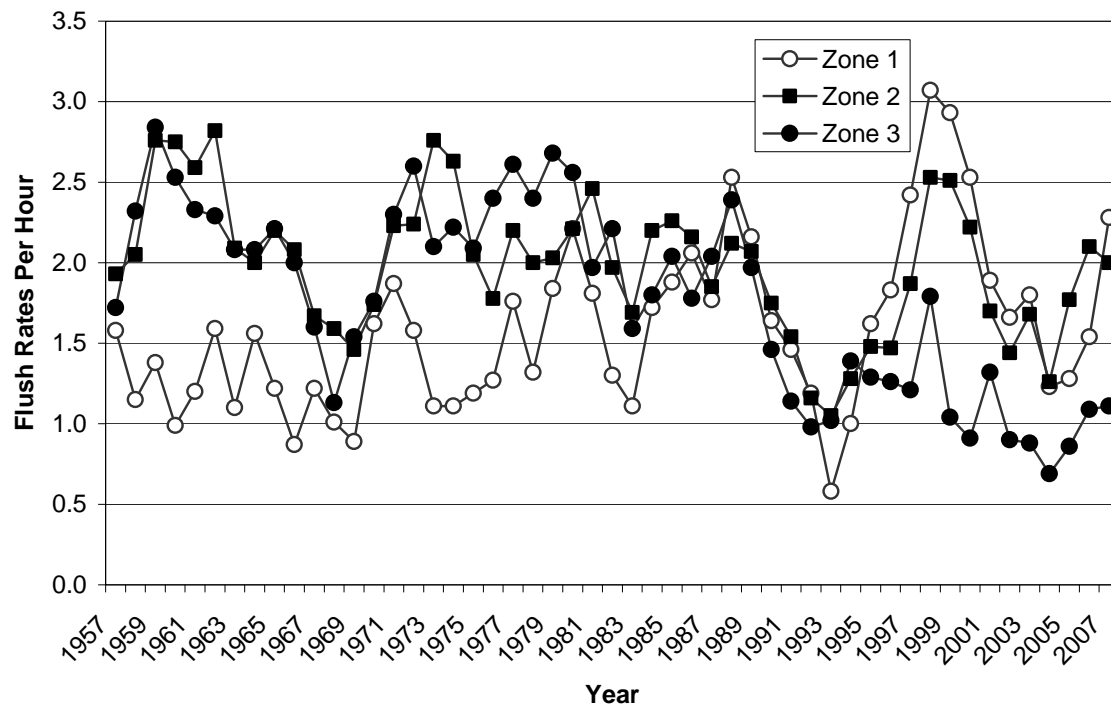


Figure 1. Ruffed grouse flush rates as reported by cooperating hunters, 1957-2007. This figure shows a summary of the data collected during the entire grouse hunting season. Data for 2008 will be added after the end of the season.